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MORE INDIAN TALES

BY
S. B. BANERJEA
Author of *Indian Tales*



GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

7 Annas

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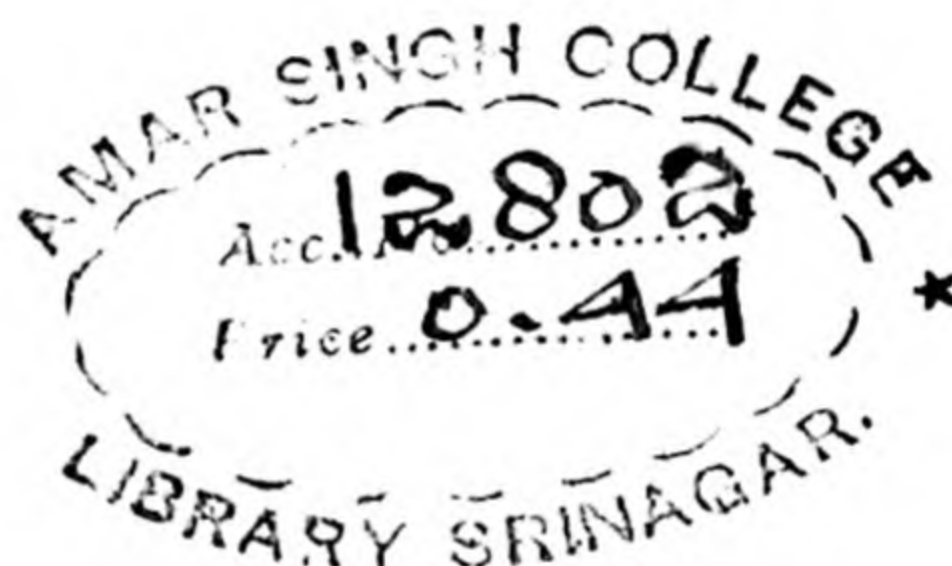
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I

HIS WORD OF HONOUR

(*From Sanskrit*)

It occurred one day to Indra, the Lord of all the gods to test the character of a certain hermit named Sukrishna.

Sukrishna was himself the son of a hermit, the famous Bipulaswaran, and he had four sons whom he was bringing up to the same calling.

Indra assumed the form of a huge bird and flying to Sukrishna's *ashram* one day, he addressed him thus :

'O holy man, I am very hungry. Please give me something to eat for I have not tasted food for many days.'

Sukrishna looked carefully at the bird and then he asked :

'What have you been doing? You look tired and utterly exhausted.'

'It is a long story, holy man. I would beg you to give me food quickly for my hunger is very great.'

'I will give you whatever you choose,' said Sukrishna, 'only tell me what you would like.'

'I should like human flesh,' said the bird.

But Sukrishna rebuked it, saying :

'You are now old and it is time for you to pray to God that in your next life you are better born. It seems that you still wish to eat flesh ; but do you not know that the eating of flesh is bad not only for your body but also for your soul ?'

'O holy man, I have no time to listen to your

teaching. I am dying of hunger and beg you to satisfy me.'

'Very well,' said the sage, 'since I have promised it you shall have human flesh. A promise must never be broken.'

Thereupon Sukrishna sent for his sons and said to them :

'I am your father and I know that you respect me and always obey me willingly. Now listen : I have promised to feed a bird with human flesh ; to save my honour one of you must sacrifice himself.'

At these words the boys were very much surprised and frightened. Not one of them said a word. After the silence had lasted for several minutes, their father asked :

'Why do you say nothing ? Is no one ready to save my honour ?'

Then one of his sons said slowly :

'Father, we have never disobeyed you before, but this time we cannot do what you wish.'

'Is then my honour nothing to you ?'

'Of course, father, your honour is very precious to us, but what you ask is impossible.'

'Alas ! But if that is the case I am afraid I shall have to feed the bird with my own flesh. I cannot break my word of honour.'

Thereupon the holy man sorrowfully performed his own *sradha* and went out to the bird.

'I am ready,' he said, 'to fulfil my promise.'

The bird answered :

'O holy man, I never eat the flesh of any living being. You must, therefore, by the use of your

yogic powers, first give up your life and then only can I satisfy my desire.'

'So be it then,' said Sukrishna ; and he sat down to give up his life.

Then the bird vanished and Indra assumed his own form again saying :

'I had heard, Sukrishna, that you are a man of honour and I came to see and test it for myself. Now that you have proved so nobly the worth of your promise, ask of me any boon, and I will grant it.'

'I have no boon to ask, O Indra. I am satisfied with my lot.'

'You are a true *sadhu*,' said Indra. 'I am delighted to find that you are not only a man of your word but also without desires. But you must be rewarded, and this is what I decree : so long as you live, you shall never be molested by any devil or demons ; and when the time comes, you will go up to heaven and become one of the gods.'

And with these words Indra blessed him and disappeared.

Sukrishna's sons who had seen and listened to this interview were very ashamed, but Sukrishna said to them :

'At first I was angry with you and was ready to curse you, but my love for you will not let me. I bless you all, and I feel sure that the darkness which now clouds your intellect will be dispersed and that you will become wise, pious and worthy to lead the life of hermits. Never forget that honour is more precious than everything. Even though your life is at stake, do not forsake your honour, for a man

without honour is doomed to hell. Take my blessing now and may you never stray from the path of virtue. Your fathers before you have been famous hermits, and you must see that their reputation is never tarnished by any act of yours.

The boys bowed their heads to the ground and went about their duties.

EXERCISES

1. Who was Indra? What other names had he? What was the name of his wife?
2. Explain the meaning of 'assume', 'boon', 'lot', 'tarnish'.
3. Form short sentences using these words: 'not only... but', 'a man of his word', 'at stake'.
4. What is the moral of the story?
5. Translate the last two paragraphs into your vernacular.

II UDDALAK

IN olden times children used to be sent away from their parents at an early age to live with their teacher or *guru*. These teachers fed, clothed and lodged the boys entrusted to their care, and the *guru* and his wife were looked upon as a second father and mother. It was the *guru* who moulded the character of his pupils, and they in their turn loved and respected him. It seems that *gurus* and their pupils were always on the most friendly terms.

There was once a *guru* called Dhoumya who had two pupils, Aruni and Upamanyu. One day Dhoumya sent Aruni to a flooded field to see that the water was not flowing away. When Aruni arrived, he found that the bund was crumbling and

that water was escaping. As the hole was getting larger every moment as the water washed more of the bank away, Aruni dared not go back to his master for help. All that he could do therefore was to stop up the hole as best he could, and as he was not able to find any large stones, he finally had to lie at full length and block the gap with his own body.

He passed many uncomfortable hours in this strange position before it occurred to Dhoumya that his pupil had been absent for a long time. At last, however, Dhoumya became worried at his absence, and after questioning Upamanyu and finding that he, too, was ignorant of his friend's whereabouts, he said : 'I am afraid that some misfortune has occurred. We must go and investigate.'

So the *guru* and his pupil set off to the field. When they arrived they saw no sign of Aruni who was of course hidden by the bund. So Dhoumya began shouting, and at length he heard a faint voice in reply to his calls.

They went up to Aruni, and were very surprised to see him where he was. Aruni said to his master :

'Father, when I arrived I found that the water was flowing out through a little gap. I tried my best to repair it, but at last the only thing left to me to do was to lie down as you see me.'

Dhoumya was very pleased indeed at this proof of the goodness and affection of his pupil.

'Get up now, my son,' he said, 'the field has had enough water and you may let the rest escape.'

Then patting him on the back he said :

'You have shown true affection to your *guru* and I

give you my blessing. I declare that all the *Dharma Shastras* and the *Vedas* will always be present in your memory. And in remembrance of this day, you shall take the name of Uddalak and I promise you that this name will become famous throughout the world.'



HE HAD TO LIE AT FULL LENGTH AND BLOCK
THE GAP WITH HIS OWN BODY

EXERCISES

1. What is the moral of the story?
2. Do you know any similar story? (If no student knows it, the teacher should tell the story of the Dutch boy who closed the hole in the dyke.)
3. Explain the meaning of 'to mould', 'to crumble', 'at full length'.
4. Construct sentences using the following expressions: 'on friendly terms', 'as best he could', 'no sign of'.

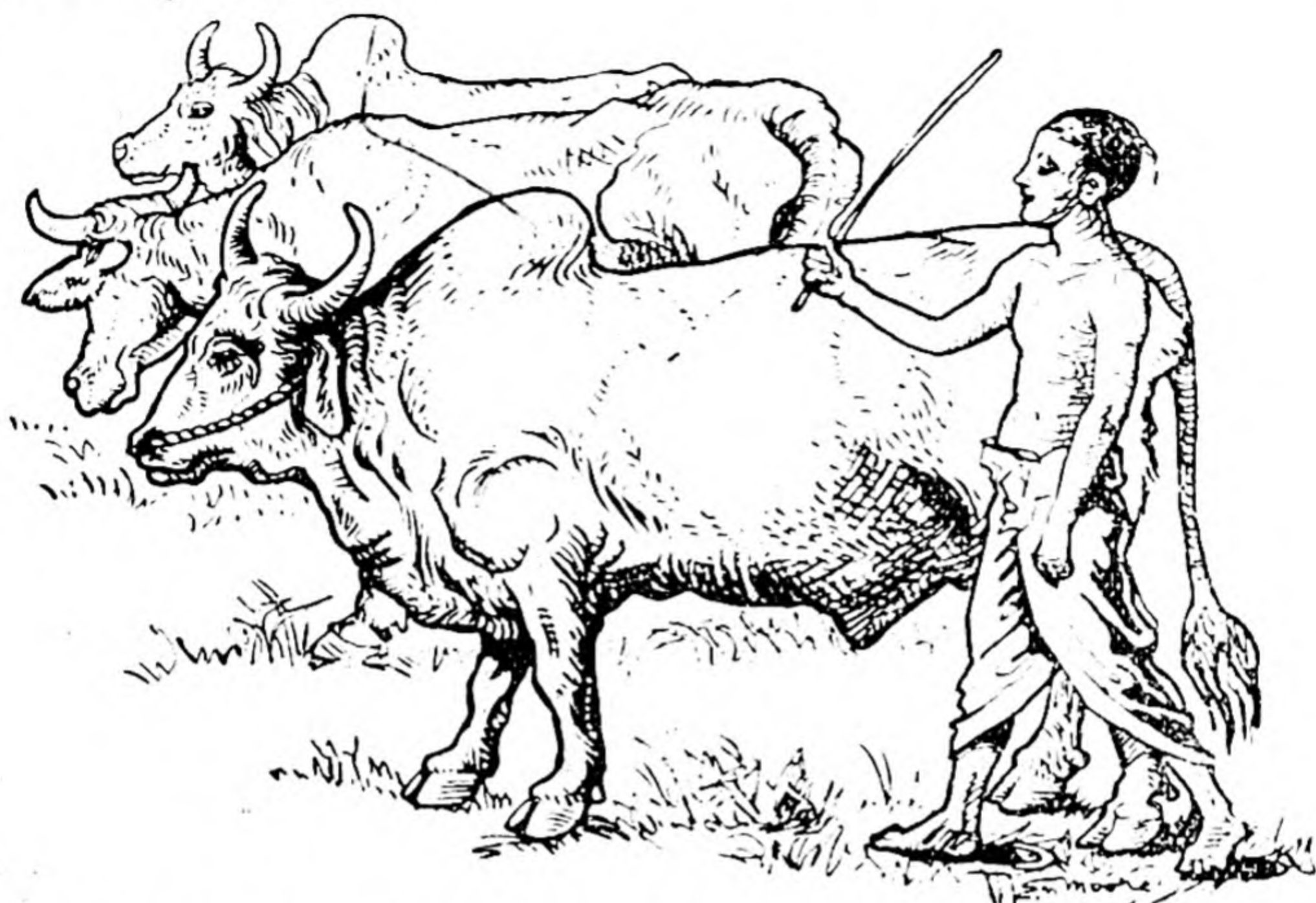
III

UPAMANYU

As I have already told you the story of Aruni or Uddalak, I will go on to narrate that of Dhoumya's other pupil Upamanyu.

The *guru* said to him one day:

‘In future, my son, it will be your duty to look after my cattle.’



‘IT WILL BE YOUR DUTY TO LOOK AFTER MY CATTLE’

‘Your wishes shall be carried out,’ said Upamanyu and bowed.

After that, Upamanyu used to go out early in the morning with the cows and not come back till evening. For the whole day he had no opportunity to have a meal.

One evening on his return his *guru* asked him : ‘How is it, my son, that although you do not get any food all day you remain so healthy?’

Upamanyu replied humbly :

‘Father, I beg for enough food to satisfy my hunger.’

Thereupon his *guru* said :

‘In future you must give me what you obtain by begging.’

‘So be it father,’ he said. And from that day Upamanyu used to hand over the food to his teacher every day.

About a week later, the *guru* asked him again:

‘How is it, my son, that though you give me all that you receive from your begging, you still remain strong and fat?’

Upamanyu replied: ‘Ah father, I beg a second time, and live on what is given me then.’

‘Indeed!’ Dhoumya exclaimed: ‘But that is not the right way for a pupil to behave. By begging a second time you are depriving other beggars of what they deserve. To beg twice is to be greedy and a student must not be that. Therefore, I command you never to beg a second time in future.’

The *guru*’s real intention in appearing to treat his pupil in this harsh manner was to test his character, and from this test Upamanyu emerged with flying colours, as we shall see.

Some days later Dhoumya had occasion to say again to Upamanyu:

‘How is it, my son, that you are still as strong and fat as ever? What is it that you do now?’

‘Father, I drink the milk of one of your cows.’

‘That is wrong, my son. Do not do it again.’

‘So be it, father,’ replied Upamanyu.

Upamanyu was now in a very difficult position and he did not know what to do. One day as he was walking along towards a tree thinking that he might perhaps satisfy his hunger with the leaves and berries on it, he was so deep in thought that he did not notice a well that lay in his path and he tumbled in.

At sunset, seeing that Upamanyu did not return with the cows. Dhoumya became anxious and set out to the grazing-ground, calling for Upamanyu as he went.

At last he heard a voice coming from the middle of the earth as it seemed, saying :

‘Father, father, here I am ! Look in the well !’

Dhoumya managed to pull Upamanyu out of the well, but when he was safe again he exclaimed :

‘Oh father, I have lost my sight. I am blind and can see nothing.’

‘Well, pray then to the Aswini Kumars. Perhaps they will be gracious to you and will restore your sight.’

Upamanyu prayed long and fervently to the Kumars and they sent down to him a medicine which would cure his blindness.

But Upamanyu would not take. He said to Dhoumya :

‘I cannot eat anything without my *guru*’s permission.’

Thereupon the Aswini Kumars turned to the sage and begged him to give his pupil the necessary permission ; and it is needless to say that he gave it with the greatest joy, being by this time deeply impressed with Upamanyu’s obedience.

As soon as Upamanyu swallowed the medicine his sight was restored and he fell down at the feet of the divine physicians thanking them for the miraculous cure which they had worked.

The chief of the Aswini Kumars said to him :

‘We are pleased with your devotion to your *guru*, Upamanyu, and we will grant you a boon.’

‘Oh Lord, I seek no favour,’ he replied. ‘All that I desire is the affection of my *guru*.’

Dhoumya was delighted when he heard these words, and placing his hands in blessing upon Upamanyu’s head he said:

‘My son, you will acquire perfect knowledge of all the *Shastras* and the *Vedas* without further study. Your time of training is over; I have nothing further to teach you. Now go to your home and settle down.’

EXERCISES

1. What virtues does Upmanyu exhibit in this story?
2. Give corresponding phrases in your vernacular to: ‘your wishes shall be carried out’, ‘he emerged from the test with flying colours’, ‘he was so deep in thought’, ‘go to your home, and settle down’.
3. Give other words with the same meaning as the following: ‘narrate’, ‘difficult’, ‘gracious’, ‘needless’, ‘physician’, ‘affection’.
4. Narrate this story very briefly as it would be told by Dhoumya.

IV

A MOTHER’S GIFT

KUNTI DEVI was the mother of the five Pandavas—Yudhisthira, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahadev. In the course of their wandering, the Pandavas and their mother once took shelter in the house of a Brahmin who lived in Ekachakra. Now this village was under the rule of a giant called Bakasur who was a cannibal. He had ordered that each household in turn must daily supply him with a human being, rice, and two buffaloes for his daily meal. If any family did not

carry out this order, he had vowed to eat all the members of it. He was such a powerful giant that his subjects were helpless and had to obey him.

It happened that the turn of the family that had sheltered the Pandavas came while they were staying there, and when they heard this, the whole family began to weep.

Kunti Devi, out of curiosity, asked the mistress of the family why she and all her relatives were crying, and when she heard the story of the giant, she said after a moment's reflection:

'Do not weep, lady, I will help you.'

'But what can you do?'

'Listen, mother: I have five sons but you have only one son and one daughter, and if your only son dies you will have no one left to look after: but I can spare one of my five sons. When we were in



A HUMAN BEING, RICE AND TWO
BUFFALOES FOR HIS MEAL

want you did not hesitate to give us shelter and food, and we can never repay the kindness that you have done us. I cannot see you and your whole family suffering when I can cure your sorrow.'

'Oh no, that cannot be,' exclaimed the woman. 'You are our guests and the *Shastras* say that a guest must be treated with honour. Guests are like gods. I cannot accept your sacrifice.'

'But you must not speak thus, dear lady. I offer my son of my own accord. Have no fear that the rule of hospitality has been broken.'

Then the Brahmin lady's tears became tears of joy. Kunti Devi summoned the second Pandava and told him he must go as a sacrifice to the giant. From endless time a mother's word has been law to a Hindu, so that when Bhim heard his fate he bowed down, took the dust of his mother's feet, and went straight to the giant's palace without even his usual club.

Bakasur was sitting on his throne. Bhim went straight to him and challenged him to a duel. This had never happened to Bakasur who was very surprised, but having recovered his composure he accepted the challenge and a fierce fight began. Bhim was as strong as Bakasur and quicker in his movements, and at last he threw the giant to the ground and broke his back. Thus was the land rid of the terror of Bakasur and Bhim's name was blessed by all the people of Ekachakra.

EXERCISES

1. Who were the five Pandavas? What was the name of their mother?
2. In which dynasty were they born?
3. Explain the meaning of 'cannibal', 'duel', 'giant'.

4. Construct short sentences using the following : 'to look after', 'out of curiosity', 'to begin to'.

V

THE STORY OF MAGHKUMAR

ONCE Buddha was born in the family of a Brahmin who lived at Machal in Magadha. Buddha then bore the name of Maghkumar, and as he grew up he became very reserved in his ways; pious, and unwilling to join in the village talk and games. At the sight of all the misery and suffering of his fellow creatures around him, his heart melted, and he made up his mind to do everything he could to better the lot of the poor and the needy.

He called together the villagers and together they decided to erect a *dharmasala* for the benefit of the strangers who passed through Machal. Maghkumar had not much money himself, but he gave generously for the erection of this building.

The villagers saw that in this and in all his doings Maghkumar was a pattern of unselfishness and generosity, and it is small wonder that they helped him in his doings, and his example caused many wicked men to change their manner of life.

But there was one man who did not like Buddha at all, and this was none other than the village headman, who had grown fat on the bribes of wicked men. Now that so many quarrels and thefts had ceased, his income had sadly diminished. As Maghkumar was clearly the cause of this, the headman resolved to teach him a lesson.

He went to the king of that country and brought a complaint against Maghkumar.

'Sire,' he said, 'I have the greatest difficulty in keeping peace in Machal now, for there is a band of scoundrels who have no respect for the law.'

'Bring those scoundrels here,' the king said to his *kotwal*. 'See that not one of them escapes.'

The *kotwal* was not slow to obey. He and a few of his men went out one night and arrested Maghkumar and his most devoted followers and marched them up to the palace.

The king was a hasty man. He trusted his *kotwal* and did not listen to what the prisoners had to say. He at once ordered Maghkumar and his followers to be trampled to death by elephants.

Some of the royal guards led the prisoners out to an open space to wait for their death. Maghkumar said to his companions:

'Friends, do not forget your *dharmā*. Do not bear the king or the headman any ill-will, but let us pray for their welfare.'

Then an elephant was seen approaching, but in spite of all the efforts of the *mahout*, it would not go anywhere near Maghkumar; instead it lifted its trunk, gave a loud trumpet, and then marched away.

Other elephants were brought but they behaved in just the same way.

The guards took this strange news to the king and he, thinking that the prisoners had enlisted the sympathy of the *mahouts*, or that perhaps they knew some *mantras* which took away the elephants' power, came to the field and himself questioned Maghkumar:



IT LIFTED ITS TRUNK, GAVE A LOUD TRUMPET, AND THEN MARCHED A WAY

‘Can you explain,’ he asked, ‘why the elephants refuse to approach you? Do you know *mantras* to scare them away?’

Maghkumar smiled and replied :

‘Yes, Sire, we do know certain *mantras* which have this power.’

‘What are they? Tell me,’ said the king.

‘They are:

1. Do not lie.
2. Do not eat fish or flesh.
3. Shun evil company.
4. Respect your elders.
5. Do not kill any animal.
6. Do not steal.
7. Do not take anything from anyone by force.
8. Remove the sufferings of your fellowmen.
9. Help the poor and needy.
10. Love all things.
11. Do not bear malice even to your enemy.
12. Live for others.’

The king was surprised that the *mantras* were so well-known, and he praised Maghkumar. He felt that he had acted hastily in condemning Maghkumar and he made more inquiries about the headman. Having discovered his evil intentions, he dismissed him and made Maghkumar headman in his place.

But Maghkumar did not exult at his victory. He saluted the king respectfully, returned to his village and went about his old duties as though nothing had happened.

EXERCISES

1. Who was Buddha? What was his father’s name?
2. What is Magadha called now?

3. Explain the meanings of 'pattern', 'to enlist', 'to shun', 'to scare away'.
4. Construct short sentences using the following: 'none other than', 'to be the cause of', 'to have difficulty in'.
5. What is the moral of this story?

VI

THE STORY OF JAGANNATH

THE god Jagannath is famous throughout India, and his shrine is at Puri where his brother Balaram and his sister Subhadra are also worshipped. Millions of Hindus flock to do reverence to Jagannath at Puri, especially at the time of the yearly Ratha Jatra. The image of Jagannath appears to be only half-finished and is without hands or feet. This is the story of how it came to be so:

Once upon a time Indradyumna, the king of Malwa, sent Brahmins all over India to find for him the most beautiful image of Vishnu. Now one Brahmin named Vidyapati stayed in the house of a fowler whose name was Basu. He found that Basu went every day into the forest carrying flowers and fruits for his god and being interested he persuaded Basu to take him also one day to see his god. When they had marched for a long time through a forest, they came upon a blue stone image. Basu was showing this to Vidyapati when they heard a voice from the image saying:

'I am wearied of thy jungle flowers and fruits and crave for cooked rice and sweetmeats. No longer shalt thou see me in the form of thy blue god. Hereafter I shall be known as Jagannath, the Lord of the World.'

They were much astonished and the Brahmin Vidyapati hurried back to Indradyumna and told him of this miracle. The king himself at once set off to visit the blue stone image, but although they searched through and through the forest they could not find it again. Basu the fowler said it had been covered up in a sand-storm. The king was sure that this was Vishnu's doing and he spared himself no penances to learn what had become of the little blue god. At last his prayers and sacrifices were rewarded and he heard a voice saying to him :

'Go into the forest and there you will find a great log. Take it, and make an image.'

Sure enough, they found a huge black log lying in the jungle, but when the king summoned carpenters to hew the wood, all their tools became blunt and they could not cut the log at all. King Indradyumna began his prayers and sacrifices again and after some time Vishnu took pity upon him and, assuming the shape of a carpenter, came to the king and offered to make an image for him. The only condition he made was that he must not be disturbed until he had finished. If anyone came even to look at his work, he said, he would go away at once.

Indradyumna agreed to these terms, for it was plain to him that this was no common carpenter. So he erected a hut and Vishnu the carpenter was put inside with the log, and the door was shut.

But days and weeks passed and Indradyumna became impatient to see what progress was being made. Perhaps this strange carpenter had tricked him and was doing no work at all, and living on the heaped



VISHNU ASSUMED THE FORM OF A CARPENTER

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basins of rice and *dal* curry that were daily sent into the hut. After some time the king could control his curiosity no longer. He went quietly to the hut and peeped in at the door, hoping that the carpenter would not notice him. But Vishnu saw the king's shadow and at once, reminding him of the conditions on which he had started work, he left the hut. To Indradyumna's dismay the image was still unfinished, and lacked both hands and feet and no other carpenter could cut the wood. The king began to pray to Brahma, for he was very sad that his image was not finished. But Brahma said :

'What is done cannot be undone. You little knew that it was Vishnu himself whom you fed daily with rice and *dal*. Now that he has left the work half done, no one else can finish it. You must make the best of what you have. Set up this image in a beautiful temple, even though it has no hands or feet, and it will be worshipped throughout the world by the name of Jagannath Dev.

Indradyumna obeyed Brahma's words, and Brahma himself came to the ceremony when the temple was opened.

EXERCISES

1. What do you know about the car-festival at Puri?
2. How many names has Vishnu? How many do you know?
3. Explain the meaning of 'penance', 'blunt', 'shadow', 'dismay'.
4. Construct sentences using the following : 'even though.....', 'now that.....', 'although.....', 'to set up'.

VII

THE BIRTH OF THE SUN

ONCE upon a time this world of ours was enveloped in darkness. No living creature had then appeared. There was no sun, on moon; all was dark and cold.

Then at the will of the Creator, the world became a living reality. Birds and beasts were created, and men lived upon the earth.

One memorable day, Aditi, the wife of a man named Kashyaka bore her husband a son. They called him Surya (the sun). At his birth the face of the world changed. What was dead before now became alive and vigorous; darkness was removed for ever.

At the time of Surya's birth a voice was heard saying: 'Surya will become the Lord of the Universe. He will destroy the Asuras who molest mankind.'

Now, one day, when Surya had grown up into a tall and handsome young man, the god Satakratu challenged the Asuras to a fight. The battle was long and fierce, but the Asuras appeared to be winning until Surya came to Satakratu's aid by spreading his rays and causing the Asuras to retreat before their brightness and heat, thus enabling Satakratu to advance and destroy them entirely.

In reward for this act, the god Viswakarma gave Surya his daughter, Sanga, in marriage. In course of time she gave birth to a son whom they called Vaivaswata Manu, and later twins, Jama, and Jamuna.

After a time, however, Sanga finding herself unable to endure the brilliance of her husband's rays called for her shadow, Charya, and said to her:



SANGA, FINDING HERSELF UNABLE TO ENDURE THE BRILLIANCE OF HER HUSBAND'S RAYS, CALLED FOR HER SHADOW, CHARYA

‘I am going home to my father for a few days. In the meantime, do me the favour of filling my place. But take care that the substitution is not discovered.’

So saying, she returned to her father’s home. But he would not keep her there, and urged her to return to her husband. She, however, would not listen to his advice, but went and lived in retirement at Uttar Kuru.

Surya who had not discovered the deception that had been practised by his wife, lived with Charya, who in due course bore him three children.

Now Charya treated Sanga’s children very cruelly. The eldest son bore this ill-treatment patiently, but one day, Jama, losing patience with Charya, kicked her; whereupon she turned upon him and cursed him.

Jama at once went to his father, and told him the story, adding :

‘The way she treats us leads one to believe she is not our true mother. No mother would ever curse her own son. I kicked her in the heat of the moment, for which act I am repentant. I pray you relieve me of her curse.’

This Surya was powerless to do. But he sent for Charya, and questioned her.

‘Though it is but natural for a mother to love her younger children more than the elder ones,’ he said, ‘I suspect you are not their true mother. Tell me who you are.’

At this Charya became alarmed, but remained silent. Surya, however, insisted on knowing the truth and threatened to curse her if she did not disclose her secret.

Charya dared not keep silent any longer, and told him the whole story.

When he heard how he had been deceived, Surya's anger knew no bounds. He set off immediately for his father-in-law's house to find Sanga.

Viswakarma tried to appease his wrath: 'Sanga could not stand your power,' he said. 'To curb it she is now offering sacrifices. She is devoted to you: do not suspect her, or be angry with her. Brahma has ordered me to curb your power. You must assume a circular form, and remain in the heavens.'

To this Surya agreed, and slowly changed his appearance. He then went to the place where Sanga was. At first she was afraid to see him, but on being assured he was not angry, she went back and lived with him as his wife again.

In due course she gave birth to twin boys who came to be known as the Ashvini Kumars—the Divine Physicians.

Sanga's eldest son became famous as Vaivaswata Manu, the father of the human race. The curse on Jama was taken off, and he became the judge of man's sin and merit. His sister Jamuna became a river, and flowed on earth to the good of the human race.

EXERCISES

1. According to Hindu legend who is the father of the human race?
2. Why did Sanga leave her husband?
3. Whom did she appoint in her place?
4. How did Surya discover this deception?
5. Where does the Jamuna flow?
6. Explain the meaning of: 'enveloped', 'substitution', 'powerless', 'appease', 'assume'.

VIII

THE LEARNED FOOLS

(From Sanskrit)

FOUR Brahmins once lived in a village, and were always to be seen together whispering and laughing to each other and pointing at the passers-by. They did no harm to anyone, but they were quite without sense and were laughed at by the rest of the village.

They felt that they were not regarded with the respect due to them as Brahmins and so they came to a decision to leave the ungrateful village and go away to learn the *Shastras*. They did not tell anyone of their intentions, but secretly crept out of the village one evening and made their way to Kanyakubja. When the villagers noticed that they had gone they were glad to be rid of four such foolish fellows.

The four friends by great perseverance at last succeeded in learning the *Upanishads* and the *Vedas*; but it did not make them any more intelligent. However, they decided that their education was finished and that they would therefore go back to their village to show how learned they had become. They were sure that when they arrived they would no longer be laughed at.

On the way they came to a place where two roads joined, but they could not decide which road to take. They sat arguing about it for some hours and then a funeral procession came along the road. They learned from one of the men in the procession that it was the body of a *mahajan* which was being taken to the burning ghat, and the first of the Brahmins thereupon clapped his hands and gleefully explained to his companions:

‘Don’t you remember? Our *Shastras* say that the path which a *mahajan* takes is the right path. It is easy therefore: we have only to follow this procession, and we are sure to reach our village.’

His friends agreed with him, and they all set off to follow the procession to the burning ghat.

When they arrived, they saw an ass looking for grass. After gazing at it for some minutes, the second of the Brahmins cried out:

‘Don’t you remember? The *Shastras* say that he whom you meet in a festival ground, at the time of danger, at a time of famine, at a king’s door, or at a cremation ground is a friend. Therefore this ass which is in the cremation ground is our friend. Let us hasten to make his acquaintance.’

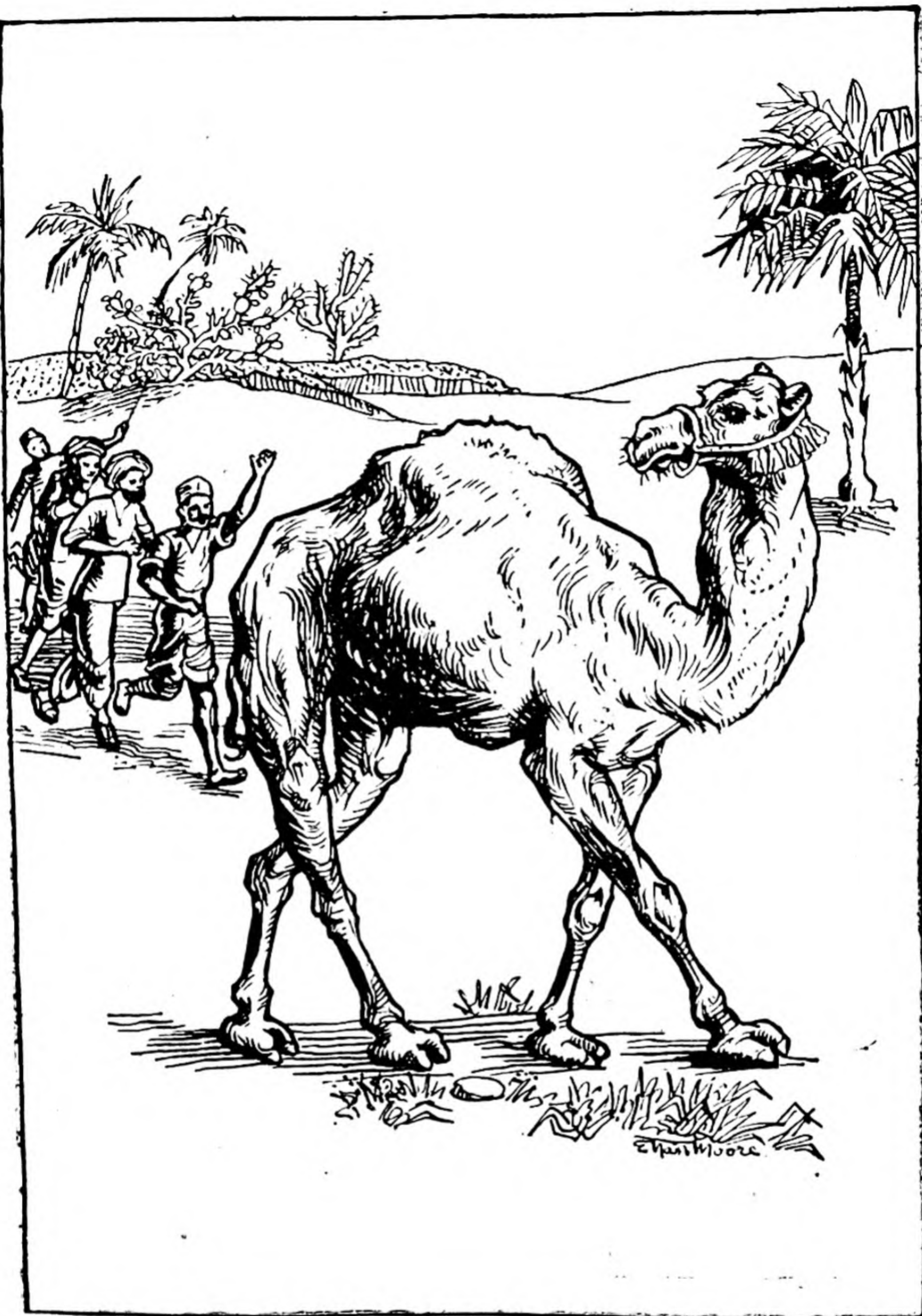
His friends agreed with him and they went towards the ass and began to pat and fondle it. But to their surprise the ass started kicking and braying.

In disappointment they walked on, and after a little while saw a camel. The third Brahmin looked closely at it and then exclaimed:

‘Look, this is Dharma! Don’t you remember? Our *Shastras* say that Dharma walks rapidly. Now this camel is walking rapidly, so it must be Dharma.’

Thereupon the four Brahmins ran after the camel to catch it. The owner, who was resting near by, concluded that these four men intended to steal his animal, so he ran after them with his stick and beat them about the shoulders.

Feeling more sad than ever at this second disappointment, they walked on and at length came to a river. But how were they to cross it? They sat down



'NOW THIS IS A CAMEL, WALKING RAPIDLY, SO IT MUST BE DHARMA'

upon the bank and gave themselves up to deep thought. Presently the fourth Brahmin saw a log being carried down the stream by the current. Then he said :

‘Don’t you remember? Our *Shastras* say that anything which floats will carry one along. This log is floating and therefore it will carry us across the stream.’

Thereupon he sat on the log, but to his surprise it sank under the water and he with it.

‘Now what is to be done in this crisis?’ cried the third Brahmin.

The first replied: ‘Don’t you remember? The *Shastras* say that at a time of danger, you should try to save half of your property if you cannot save it all. Now our friend is drowning and we cannot save his whole body. Let us therefore cut off his head which is still not under the water. In this way we shall save at least a part of his body.’

‘Yes, yes,’ the two friends cried. ‘That is a very good idea.’ So the second Brahmin took out his knife and, catching hold of the drowning Brahmin’s hair, he cut off his head.

But to their disappointment it neither spoke nor wept nor smiled. What were they to do now? After a long consultation they decided to sit down and copy their friend’s head. For, said the third Brahmin:

‘Don’t you remember? The *Shastras* say, “Sound, touch and other things are like nothing.” So we too will neither see anything, hear anything, taste anything, nor touch anything.’

The other two agreed and in a few weeks they had all died from starvation and the four heads lay quiet side by side.

EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of 'bray', 'crisis', 'fondle', 'starvation', 'cremation'.
2. What is the modern name of Kanyakubja ?
3. What is the moral of the story ?
4. Use the following phrases in sentences of your own :
'after a little while', 'to be rid of', 'came to a decision',
'to give oneself up to'.

IX

A WORTHY SERVANT

(*From Sanskrit*)

ONCE there lived a young prince who was named Birbal. Having lost all his money he was forced to leave his home and wander over the face of the earth, accompanied by his wife and son.

One day Birbal came to the court of a great and powerful king, Sudraka by name. He gained admittance to the king's presence, and begged to be employed in some capacity. The king, pleased with his appearance, said :

'I can appoint you as my door-keeper ; are you willing to serve me ?'

'Yes, Sire.'

'What pay do you expect ?'

'Four hundred pieces of gold daily.'

'That is too much,' said the king, 'for a door-keeper to ask.'

'If you think so, Sire, I shall have to try elsewhere,' said Birbal. 'But I do not think you will find the pay too high.' So saying he saluted the king and left the court.

The king thought for a while and consulted his ministers who advised him to employ the prince for a few days in order to find out his disposition. Birbal was therefore re-called and engaged on his own terms. He was to stand at the king's door night and day, leaving only with his master's permission. It was then that the king came to know by making secret inquiries that Birbal intended to give half his salary to the Brahmins, and to distribute half the remainder among the poor, only keeping what was left for himself.

On the fourteenth day of the dark half of the moon, the king, as he lay on his bed, heard the sound of bitter weeping outside his door.

'Who is weeping?' he asked Birbal.

'I will go and inquire, Sire,' replied the prince rising and leaving the room. The king's curiosity was aroused, and he decided to go and make inquiries himself. So unobserved by Birbal, he took his sword and followed him.

Outside, Birbal found a beautiful young girl weeping.

'Who are you?' he asked. 'Why do you weep?'

'I am the patron goddess of King Sudraka,' she answered.

'I have lived at his palace for a long while, and am weeping now because I must leave.'

'Why must you go?'

'His death is near. At the end of three days he will die,' replied the goddess, weeping still more.

'But can he not be saved?' asked Birbal.

'Yes. If you cut off the head of your son and offer it as a sacrifice to the goddess Sarvamangala,



HE WAS ON THE POINT OF CUTTING OFF HIS OWN HEAD,
WHEN THE GODDESS SARVAMANGALA APPEARED

then the king will not die,' answered the goddess, and as she spoke these words she slowly disappeared before the prince's eyes.

Birbal thought for a moment, then went to his house, and rousing his wife and son, told them what the goddess had said.

'If my head can save our master's life,' said his son, 'I am happy to lay down my own. Why then delay the matter, father? Let it be tonight.'

So Birbal took his wife and son to the temple of Sarvamangala, and falling down before her image he cried out:

'Oh divine mother: take this my son's life in exchange for that of king Sudraka. Let him live long and be prosperous.' Then drawing his bright and shining sword he cut off the head of his son.

When Birbal saw the dead boy lying there, his grief was so strong he felt he could live no longer without him, so drawing his sword once again, he cut off his own head and fell down beside his son. His wife, seeing both her husband and child lying dead, knew she had nothing more to live for, so straightway put an end to her life too.

All this time the king had been standing hidden in the shadows watching everything. After the death of such a faithful servant, he felt he, too, could go on living no longer. He drew his sword from its sheath, and was on the point of cutting off his own head, when the goddess Sarvamangala appeared before him.

'Do not commit such a rash act, my son,' she said.

'Mother,' replied the king, 'I do not need this kingdom, or wealth, or life. But if you are not

displeased with me, restore, I pray you, the lives of Birbal, his wife and his son: otherwise I must follow their footsteps.'

'Sudraka, I am pleased with you,' replied the goddess, 'Sprinkle some holy water on their bodies, and they shall be restored.'

The king obeyed Sarvamangala's command immediately, and was overjoyed to see they lived again. He did not linger there, but left the place immediately unseen by anyone, and returned to the palace. Birbal came back shortly after.

'Birbal, who was weeping outside?' asked the king.

'Only, a young woman, Sire.'

'Where is she?'

'As soon as she saw me she vanished.'

'I see,' the king remarked smiling. 'You must be tired. Retire, O Birbal, thou true and worthy servant. May God bless you.'

Birbal, still unaware that the king knew anything of what had happened, wondered at his master's words but decided not to question him. He went out without saying anything.

EXERCISES

1. What virtues did Birbal possess?
2. Did the king possess any similar virtues?
3. What is the moral of the story?
4. Explain the meaning of: 'forced', 'intend', 'unobserved', 'overjoyed', 'unaware'.
5. Construct short sentences using the following:
'gain admittance', 'on the point of', 'came to know', 'wonder at'.

X

BE NOT HASTY

(From Sanskrit)

ONCE there lived in the city of Ujjain, a Brahmin priest named Madhava. One day his wife asked him to watch over their infant son while she went out to bathe.

While she was away there came some messengers from the king's court bidding Madhava proceed there at once to perform a religious ceremony.

Now Madhava was very poor, and he knew that if he did not go immediately the king would engage some other priest, and he would not get anything. But what was he to do with his child? His wife would be late in returning home, and there was nobody else to look after the infant. At last he decided to place the baby in charge of his weasel. He had kept the animal for many years, and had nourished it and cared for it since it was born.

Shortly after Madhava's departure, the weasel noticed a large black serpent slowly gliding towards the child. It immediately attacked the snake, and after a fierce battle killed it.

When the Brahmin returned, he noticed, the weasel's face was smeared with blood. He stood aghast. The weasel had surely killed his child. He became enraged, and seizing a thick stick struck the poor animal dead with one blow. He then ran to the room where he had left his baby, and was amazed to find the child playing safe and sound beside the dead body of a serpent.

He then saw what he had done, and began to

lament his folly. He had killed in haste a friend.
and realized now too late the extent of his loss.

So the wise men advise :

Never be hasty.
Look before you leap.



IT IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED THE SNAKE

EXERCISES

1. Do you know any other maxims in English or in any Indian language which illustrate the moral of this story ?
2. Why did the Brahmin decide to leave his baby ?
3. Explain the meaning of the following : 'to watch over', 'to engage someone', 'to stand aghast'.
4. Translate the last paragraph into your vernacular.

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